

M·N·R·G



Midwest Natural
Resources Group

MNRG Annual Meeting—November 29-30, 2006
U.S. EPA, 12th Floor Conference Center
77 West Jackson Blvd.
Chicago, IL

Meeting Minutes

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Agenda: The agenda for this meeting is listed on the MNRG web page. All meeting attachments are also linked from the agenda. Where relevant, these minutes will reference the agenda and attachment.

Attendees: *See agenda for list of attendees.*

Day One: Wednesday, November 29, 2006

Opening comments: Bharat Mathur (EPA), MNRG Chair welcomed everyone to Chicago and reiterated that the purpose of the MNRG is to serve as a forum for federal agencies to collaborate on shared projects or issues. Bharat reviewed the agenda stating that we will continue working on two existing MNRG topics—terrestrial invasive species and coordinating our work in Indian country—and will introduce a new idea on protecting and restoring wetlands in the Midwest.

Robyn Thorson (FWS), MNRG Vice Chair also welcomed the group and said she was looking forward to the next two days as well.

Terrestrial Invasive Species Session:

See agenda for the handouts and power point presentation.

Carmen Chapin (NPS): As the Chair of the Terrestrial Invasive Species Committee (TISC), she started this session by stating the progress made since July '06 when the MNRG formed the TISC and asked them to implement the “*Action Plan for Addressing Terrestrial Invasive Species Within the Great Lakes Basin.*” Progress made since July include:

- The May 2003 MNRG Invasive Species MOA has been updated and will be signed today;
- MNRG letters of support on invasive species activities were sent to the National Invasive Species Council (NISC), the Inter-Agency Task Force of the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration (GLRC) and the St. Louis Code of Conduct, a group concerned with best practices in invasive species management;
- A web page has been created on the MNRG web site;
- The top 20 actions from the Plan were prioritized, and
- Agency staff has been working on a number of those actions and will report on their progress at this meeting.

Phyllis Ellin (NPS): She stated that the GLRC had addressed aquatic invasive species but not terrestrial. Based on a number of requests, the MNRG agreed to work on this issue and agreed to include this effort into the 48 near term actions of the GLRC.

Progress Report on Action Plan: Five different agency representatives discussed the work they have done since July. Each person presented their work by:

- Presenting what element of the plan they addressed (e.g., Prevention, Restoration, Education, etc.) and why that element is important to that agency;
- Why this element is important to other agencies;
- How much progress has been made to date, and
- What are the future actions.

The five presenters and the element of the plan they addressed were:

- Jan Schultz, (USFS)—Prevention
- Brian Smith, (FHWA)—Control and Management
- Barb Mazur, (EPA)—Restoration
- June Wendlandt, (BLM)—Education and Public Awareness
- Carmen Chapin, (NPS)—Education and Public Awareness

Following these presentations, Carmen presented a chart that identified the top 20 action items from the plans. The chart identified the action, the agency that was taking the lead and the date that the work was or will be completed. While many agencies had started work on the Action Plan, there were other items that were still not completed and we needed other agencies to provide some support. Doug Holy (NRCS) next talked about the contacts and links that he has made between the TISC and the NISC and how we can forward our efforts by working with them.

Question and answer session:

John Perrecone (EPA) led this session with the goal of asking the panel to answer any questions and to ask the senior managers in the audience what actions they can commit to from the matrix that was prepared for this meeting. The key items from this session include:

- At the outset, Carmen stated that the TISC is meant to facilitate information exchange and is meant to present options to the agencies on how to best coordinate any invasive species activities among the group. It is not intended to serve as the deciding body on what or how actions should be implemented—that

is the purview of each agency's mission and needs. The TISC is meant to complement agency actions and not to control them.

- Will the group develop a list of approved native species that can be used by the agencies in doing any restoration work? Yes, that is the intention and there was some discussion on how that can be accomplished by the group.
- What is the best way to work with the states and other entities to implement a weed free mulch program?
- There was a discussion on the best way to conduct education and outreach and a number of ideas were shared. The TISC was requesting some funding and assistance in developing some web-based information as well as a MNRG poster or display that can be used for conferences, workshops, outreach, etc.
- There was a discussion on how to streamline the NEPA process that would provide a categorical exclusion for federal projects that disrupt the land which may cause the spread of invasive species.
- Based on this discussion, the senior managers asked the TISC to develop a specific list of what the group is requesting of the senior managers so they could discuss this during their executive session later in the day.

During this session, Steve Goranson (EPA, Office of Environmental Information) agreed to work with the TISC on providing data management services as identified in the Plan. Randy Moore (USFS) also agreed to fund the poster and General Crear (COE) agreed to provide support as well. Donna Hepp (USFS) also suggested that we try to reach more Department of Agriculture agencies and the senior managers agreed to send a letter to some of those agencies to join the TISC.

Signing of the Invasive Species MOA : *See agenda for Invasive Species MOA.* Nine of the agency managers signed the revised Invasive Species MOA and two other managers not present will sign it in the near future.

Nature-Deficit Disorder, Robyn Thorson: *See agenda for handouts.*

Robyn had seen a recent presentation from Richard Louv who wrote a book entitled, "Last Child in the Woods, Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder" and she wanted to discuss this idea with the group. The concept is that our children are disconnected from nature and their perception of the natural world may have an impact on how those areas are protected and managed in the future. The book and the web site provide a number of actions that can be taken by parents, educators, nature center staff and agencies at all levels to remedy this situation. While there is not a national call for action from our agencies at this point, Robyn felt that we may be asked to inventory our current education programs, identify any of that work as our priorities, seek to improve our interpretation programs and find better ways among agencies to coordinate our environmental education programs.

The group had a lively debate about what the MNRG can or should do to address this situation and the group agreed that we will include this topic on the agenda for our next meeting.

Luncheon Speaker: Ms. Allegra Cangelosi, Northeast-Midwest Institute

Presentation: Reaching Washington: How the MNRG can increase its influence in the invasive species policy arena

See agenda for the power point presentation.

Federal Agency Coordination in Indian Country: Herb Nelson (BIA)

See agenda for handouts and power point presentation.

Herb updated the group on what had occurred since July which included:

- Conducting an October meeting of the MOU Work Group;
- Revising the text of the current MOU;
- Increasing federal agency participation in the MOU work group, and
- Developing a preliminary list of MOU work group priorities for FY 2007.

Following the slide show, the group discussed the relationship between the MNRG and the MOU Work Group. Based upon that discussion, it was proposed that the original statement be revised to read as follows:

“The MNRG agrees to serve as a forum for its member agencies and the MOU Work Group to bring issues needing inter-agency coordination concerning tribal programs.”

Herb will bring this back to the MOU work group for a final determination. The senior managers also agreed to keep this topic on our meeting agendas so they can best address environmental issues on Indian lands.

Nutrient Farming: The Business of Environmental Management, Don Hey, The Wetlands Institute

See agenda for handouts and power point presentation.

Don was invited to present this topic to the MNRG Annual Meeting. The concept is that wetlands can be created by intentionally flooding low level areas near major rivers. By flooding these areas, nutrients are stored in this water and they are not deposited in the river which eventually drains into the Gulf of Mexico creating a hypoxic zone. Don said that these retained nutrients can be measured and “farmed”, and the farmer would be able to exchange these nutrient “credits” between sources to meet regulatory objectives or water quality goals. A good example would be where a Waste Water Treatment Plant that needs to reduce its nutrient loads to a waterway would buy nutrient credits from a farmed wetland in order to meet its regulatory standards. This approach is much like existing CO₂ and Sulfur Dioxide trading programs currently in place but this system has not yet been as developed as those. There are no current nutrient trading programs in place but Don is working to develop one.

Don views this as an ideal way to create a partnership between USDA, USEPA, other agencies and interested land owners. By creating this system, there is an incentive to farmers/ranchers who implement conservation practices that improve water quality. Don explained that this system can generate thousands of created wetlands at one time that can meet the goals of the GLRC as well as meeting the water quality needs of the regulatory agencies in the Midwest. His talk was well received by the audience and Randy Moore

(USFS) was interested in how this may work at some land controlled by the Forest Service in Southern Illinois.

Senior Manager Executive Session: The senior managers conducted an executive session where they reviewed the information provided earlier in the day and discussed other topics of interests.

General Session on MNRG Work: The remainder of the group listened to the following three sessions on innovative work taking place in the Midwest.

Great Lake Habitat Restoration Initiative, Jan Miller (COE)

See agenda for handout and power point presentation.

This Initiative is part of a national program to help evaluate complex water resources issues in large multi-jurisdictional watersheds. It is a 2-year, \$1 million project to develop an implementation plan for the protection and restoration of wetlands and aquatic habitat that builds upon the recommendations of the Strategy of the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration. The Initiative will support inventories of existing wetland programs, place-based actions, and analysis of performance measures for prioritizing actions related to wetland restoration. A steering committee for the Initiative has been established and a charter for the steering committee has been adopted. A workshop on the Initiative was held at the SOLEC meeting on November 3, 2006 in conjunction with the wetlands subcommittee of the Regional Working Group of the Great Lakes Interagency Task Force. Issues discussed during the workshop include data base management for wetland inventories, metrics for wetland restoration, and agreement among wetland groups on an implementation strategy.

SPARROW Modeling Program, Dale Robertson (USGS)

See agenda for handout and power point presentation.

Excessive nutrients in surface water are among the most persistent water-quality problems in the nation. EPA is implementing a national strategy to develop water-body specific nutrient criteria for lakes, streams, wetlands, and estuaries to improve the beneficial ecological uses of surface water. Part of this effort involves determining a more accurate subdivision of nutrient eco-regions. Refinements of the current regionalization process were conducted in Wisconsin to test a new approach. A model to include a full suite of input of nitrogen and phosphorus loads will be applied to the Upper Mississippi and the Great Lakes watersheds using the SPAtially referenced Regressions On Watershed attributes (SPARROW) model developed by the USGS. Information from this model will be used to better define nutrient and sediment loadings and rank all of the individual basins based on their relative loadings from the model output.

Wisconsin Cooperative Conservation Initiative, Tom Krapf (NRCS) and John Perrecone (EPA)

See agenda for handout.

The Wisconsin Cooperative Conservation Initiative was established in 2004 to multiply the benefits of federal and state conservation programs by encouraging agencies to focus resources on high priority watersheds. There are no rigid program rules to participate in the Initiative. The principal outcomes of the Initiative are to strengthen relationships among agencies, improve delivery of on-the-ground conservation, and demonstrate the effectiveness of cooperative efforts. For example, the Initiative selected the Upper Rock watershed as a priority watershed in 2005. An additional \$500,000 in EQIP funds were secured to provide cost share and technical assistance for manure storage, Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans, and other associated conservation practices. The Initiative has also worked on terrestrial invasive species issues and conducted outreach and education efforts.

Day Two: Thursday, November 30, 2006

GLRC Wetland Goals and MNRG Involvement: Panel of Bob Krska (FWS), John Perrecone (EPA) and Dave Brakhage (Ducks Unlimited)

See agenda for handout and power point presentations

Bharat Mathur introduced this session as an effort that may become a future MNRG initiative that seeks to protect and restore wetlands in the Midwest (both for the GLRC and in other basins) with the help of corporate support. The panel has been investigating approaches to achieving this end. It is hoped that, with corporate support, the MNRG can accelerate the rate of wetland gains and create a sustainable approach to achieving environmental goals.

Bob Krska (FWS) discussed the work of the Interagency Task Force's (IATF) Wetland Subcommittee that has been tasked with protecting 200,000 acres of wetlands in the Great Lakes Basin. This work is to be achieved with all relevant partners collaborating to achieve this goal.

John Perrecone (EPA) discussed efforts to date to engage the private sector to achieve this goal. One approach is to work with Coastal America's Corporate Wetland Restoration Partnership (CWRP), which is a program that has been effective in other parts of the country. John also suggested that the MNRG members work on their own to identify a series of corporate partners that can help us identify the motivation and opportunities for corporate involvement in this effort.

Dave Brakhage (Ducks Unlimited) presented the challenge from the perspective of a non-governmental organization and showed how Ducks Unlimited works with corporate entities. Dave showed the range of projects that could be undertaken in the Great Lakes and stated that DU was willing and able to partner with the MNRG to achieve this goal.

A general discussion ensued with these key items raised:

- There is support for this work via MNRG but it would be helpful if a background piece could be prepared that shows the kind of work that has been completed and

what work we see in the future. This background piece should also include an MNRG message on what we see as success and what our role should be with corporate entities.

- Gary Gulezian (EPA) stated that Administrator Johnson would be very interested in attending a kick-off meeting with corporate entities in the Midwest to show how the federal agencies can partner with this group to achieve the GLRC wetland goals.
- Pat Glithero (FEMA) stated that FEMA wants to be involved with this effort since they are in a position to purchase wetlands after floods and other natural disasters.
- Ernie Quintana (NPS) reminded the group that this should not be viewed as a new MNRG initiative but as an approach that could be pursued by each individual agency as they work on wetlands restoration. This is in keeping with other MNRG work where we can collectively work on projects and those agencies can use that approach to work with corporate entities to promote wetland restoration. However, not all agencies may be able to work on this effort and that should also be recognized by the MNRG.
- The senior managers agreed that the panel should proceed with this effort and that staff members should identify a number of corporate entities to discuss what is needed to make this a success in the Midwest. What motivates industry to get involved? How much are they willing to contribute? What kind of projects are they interested in supporting? Where in the basin are the projects and what are the benefits to industry are there by helping? These questions and more need to be pursued with industry.
- In sum, this was a very lively session and the MNRG senior managers definitely felt that we could add value to this effort by working as a team and approaching industry in that manner. John and the panel were asked to continue working on this and report back on a regular basis to the group.

Reaction from Senior Leaders and Action Items

Based on the two day meeting, the following action items which were developed at the senior leader session on day one were presented by John Perrecone (EPA).

**MNRG Agreements from Annual Meeting
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Invasive Species—Commitments from Agencies

- EPA: Data Management assistance from Steve Goranson, Chief, Information Branch. Carmen will follow-up to define TISC needs.
- The managers agreed to the following items that the TISC list created at the meeting. The Planning Committee will draft a letter from MNRG Chair to group to record those items and affirm commitment:
 1. Encourage the use of weed free forage/mulch on federal lands and for federally funded projects.
 2. In the absence of State certification for weed free forage/mulch, MNRG agencies may choose from a range of options suggested by the TISC.
 3. Utilize language in contracts, grants and agreements to require or encourage the use of native plant species in restoration and mitigation projects.
 4. Agency seniors should encourage the use of example contract/grant language as appropriate to specific situations to prevent the spread of invasive species.
- EPA committed to the following item:
 5. Provide links to and from agencies on native species sources and recommendations on the MNRG/TISC website.
- They agreed to these items as well:
 6. Encourage staff to use and hand out invasive species educational materials and incorporate in agency training.
 7. Encourage use of invasive species information sheet during staff meetings at all levels.
 8. Increase agency participation in TISC work as it fits with the missions of the agencies.
 9. Involve MNRG communications committee in public message (website/displays, etc.)
- The managers agreed to produce an MNRG terrestrial invasive species poster and USFS agreed to fund it for \$3500. However, COE may be also able to produce this poster as well with in-house staff. The seniors needed more information on certain aspects of the request. Carmen will work with TISC, Communications Committee and USFS and COE to clarify request and make final arrangements.
- Send a letter from MNRG Chair to show progress of TISC and to invite APHIS and other agencies to participate (TISC Chair and Planning Committee chair will work on this letter)

National Conference on Ecosystem Restoration—April 2007, Kansas City

- The senior managers agreed to contribute \$500 per agency (\$7500 total) to fund the Internet Cafe at the conference—this will give MNRG a continual presence at the conference. The Planning Committee will work with David Vigh for details on how to transfer the funds.

Other Items

- Send a letter from MNRG Chair to Merlin Bartz's (NRCS) Office thanking him for his involvement and requesting that NRCS stays involved in MNRG (Planning Committee)

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- MNRG senior managers agreed to support the MNRG work with Tribal issues—this does not require a letter; only a verbal agreement to include this item, when appropriate, for future meeting agendas.
- We will include an agenda item on Nature-Deficit Disorder for the next meeting—there were some very good comments from the audience and we should consider what it means for us.
- Poll Planning Committee members for location and venue for next MNRG senior meeting—time frame for June/July and we should be in a natural or outdoor setting. (Planning Committee)

Bharat and Robyn thanked everyone for their active participation during the meeting. The meeting was adjourned by 11:00 am on Thursday, November 30.